

# IN THE HOUSE!

House of Gordon USA Newsletter

Volume 12 Issue 2

May 2018



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What's Happening  
In the House!

How Do I Interpret  
My atDNA or Family  
Finder Results?

Timbuktu, True  
Love & Tragedy



*Alexander Gordon Laing,  
Timbuktu, True Love & Tragedy...  
this was a man of strong will.*

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**In the House** is the Official Newsletter of the **House of Gordon USA** and is published biannually. Newsletters are sent in December by e-mail, and in May by USPS to its members. The **House of Gordon USA** is a 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation organized to promote the history, heritage and traditions of Scotland and the Gordon Clan. Donations of funds, books and other property made to House of Gordon USA are deductible contributions for the purpose of Federal Income Tax Returns.

Articles and other materials appropriate for publication are encouraged. All matters submitted for printing are subject to the Editor's approval, who reserves the right to edit prior to publication.

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MEMBERSHIP in the **House of Gordon USA** is available to all who bear the surname Gordon, an Associated Family name or to one who has a sincere interest in the Gordons and all things Scottish.

Annual Dues of \$25 are payable annually. Remit to **House of Gordon USA**, 111 Holly Hill Road Enterprise, AL 36330-3410 or remit using Paypal Please visit our website: [houseofgordonusa.org](http://houseofgordonusa.org) for further information.

***In The House!***

Lois Todd, Editor

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# President's Message



Hello Fellow Gordons!

This past year was an extremely exciting one for us being the Honored Clan at Grandfather Mountain and hosting a visit from our fabulous Chief! It was interesting to hear many people from other clans talking about how they wished their clan chief was as personable and approachable as ours. We are

fortunate indeed to have Granville at the head of our family group and I know that we are in good hands for many years to come with him, and his son Alistair and his grandson Cosmo.

You may have noticed that the return address on the newsletter, proxies, and membership applications has changed. I am sad to have to announce that Bonnie has resigned from her position as our Treasurer and Membership Secretary due to personal family reasons. She did a spectacular job and did much to ensure that the House of Gordon ran smoothly so that we could grow our organization. We are sorely going to miss her. But, when God closes a door He opens a window and we are blessed to have Jen Mills Martin of Alabama taking on the role of Membership Secretary, and her husband David Martin taking on the role of Treasurer. These two will see to it that we stay on track and keep running smoothly. Welcome to the Board to both!

I would like to call your attention to The Epic Project. As you know we took The Epic Project under our 501C Umbrella and we will stand as the main Clan sponsor in 2019 with the obligation of providing the tartan and a few other items for next year's recipient. I am sure our members will step up to the plate and donate generously to both our Charles O. Gordon Memorial Scholarship and to The Epic Project. Susan Gordon Rose has been working tirelessly to build her project and we are very happy to support her in her endeavors. She has built this into a quite well known scholarship program!

I would like to also highlight our Events Listings on our House of Gordon USA Facebook Page! I have asked our conveners to forward to me and Jen (who has been doing a fabulous job in helping to edit our Facebook Page and Twitter Page) a list of the events where they will be hosting a Gordon Tent. We have been entering these into the Events Calendar on our page and sharing that all over social media! I have now directed our Events Page on our main website to this source. I am hoping to get some major changes to our main website done this year—Wish Me Luck!

# *What's Happening In The House!*

TEXAS- Our lovely VP, John Gordon, sponsored a House of Gordon table at the Kerrville Celtic Association's Annual Burn's Night Dinner January 20th. We hosted a lovely family of a pair of Highland Dancers; Kathleen, Andrew, Eirik and Eliza Sutton, John's brother Ed Gordon and his lovely daughter, Allison, and my charming escort, Jody Ginger.



Allison Gordon, Ed Gordon, Katie Richards & Jody Ginger.

It was an entertaining event, with lots of music, dancing, and some amazing haggis made by a local Kerrville Scot by the name of Kirk Scheel. I even joined the

Bluebonnet Highland Country Dancers for a couple of "audience-participation" dances.

Looking forward to attending again next



year!! Katie Richards, Convener Texas

GULF STATES – The House was also represented at the Scottish Society of the Louisiana Hielands, in Shreveport, LA. Burns Night.

Liam Gordon celebrated his first Burn's night with his girlfriend, Taylor Wright, (pictured right) his parents, Susan & Kenn



Gordon (our Gulf States Convener), & former convener, Marcia Gordon McLaurin, and Stu Riggat.

Kenn and Taylor both got nominated for best dressed awards. Rightly so. They danced, we ate, and caught up with old friends and made some new ones.



Kenn was at the Northeast Louisiana Celtic Festival the first weekend of October, the last part of October he was in Zachary, LA for the Louisiana Highland

games where he won Aron's place in Clan Tent presentation, in November he was in Gulfport, MS for the Highlands and Islands games.

In April he hosted the Gordon tent at Minden, LA for the Tartan Day Festival where they enjoyed a bit of Scottish weather with a cold rainy day. Kenn said there was a Scottish gentleman there, but he told Kenn Gordon tent was also at Batesville, AR the following weekend for the Scottish Festival at Lyon College.!

**Mid- Atlantic** got its start to the festival season at Loch Norman Highland Games April 21-22nd with Megan & Marianne hosting the Gordon Tent.

Lois & David came down to lend a bit of a hand on Saturday. Gordons came out en masse to share in the fun! It was a beautiful day to be with kith & kin!

Shane Kelly was down from Canada with his daughter Hannah who was competing in Highland Dance, what fun!



## Hello from Florida!



Jen Mills Martin and Cynthia Gordon Patrick have been busy down here in Florida welcoming back returning members and welcoming new members at 8 games and festivals this past year.

In November we had the Mt. Dora Scottish Highland Games and while

it's smaller in comparison to all the others games in Florida we always have a very big Gordon presence at these games. We



welcomed 3 new members at these games and I had a good feeling about the rest of our season.

Next we had our Central Florida Games

which are the biggest ones in Florida, a two day event. It was quite chilly this year we even had to wear jackets! We had a camp stove

this year and served Irish Coffees and chili, it was perfect weather and so many Gordons came by, old friends to say hi and new ones to sign



up! We had a lot of members march in the Parade of Tartans with us, so much fun! 3 new members and their families signed up.

Sarasota Highland Games were 2 weeks later, it was warmer but the winds kicked in! We get a lot of visitors from up north at these games, Kathy Huntly Rapone brought her dad to come and meet us, we met her last year at these games and she one of my regulars at the West Coast Games.



After Sarasota Jen's games kicked in full force! It was a whirlwind in North Florida and Alabama (the Alabama Convener had pneumonia prior to her game in Dothan and was trying to recover, so Jen and family filled in for her)! That made 4 consecutive games in 4 consecutive week-ends for Jen! Whew!



NE Florida Games were in February and we welcomed back one returning member and signed up 5 new members! At the end of the day House of Gordon won The Best Clan Tent Award, very exciting and Jen deserved it!

Next up was the Panama City Beach Games where we were honored to welcome 8 new members and 1 returning member. Honorable mention to Payne Martin, Jen and David's son who helps out so much at the tent, and is also the youngest member of the House of Gordon at 6 years old! Train them young!

While Jen was in Panama City, Cindy and family were further south in Plantation down near Ft. Lauderdale at the SE Florida Games. House of



Gordon tent is in 2 different games in one state, and yes, Jen and Cindy are messaging each other all day comparing notes! We had a lot of returning members and it was great seeing old friends again.

The next weekend Jen and family were at the St. Augustine Celtic Music Festival for the St. Patrick's Day Parade which runs through the old part of the city. Jen welcomed 9 new members at this festival.

The next weekend was the SE Alabama Highland Games in Dothan, Alabama. We were delighted to welcome 1 returning member and 1 new member.

We were honored to learn we won the Best Clan Tent Award and the House of Gordon will be the Honored Clan for 2019! And that wrapped up the season for Jen, Dave (Moo), Payne and Rob! A huge thank you to all of you that came out, you are the reason why we do this!



But there were still 2 more games in the Florida season. Cindy traveled to the Dunedin Scottish Highland Games on the Gulf Coast on April 7<sup>th</sup> and had a huge turn out of returning members and new ones signed up too! These games help funding for bagpiping and drumming in public schools in Dunedin starting in elementary school, so we always like to come out and support their organization.



We were fortunate enough that member Catriona Ladd come and bring her parents, Moira and Sandy Morris come from Aberdeen to visit with us. Moira works at The Gordon Highlanders Museum and she told us all about what she does there. Once she came into the tent she picked up a museum brochure that was on the table and started talking to everyone



who came in the tent. Catriona said, "She's right in her element!" It was such a joy to have them with us at the games.

Another visitor we had was Shane and Beth Kelly's daughter, Hanna who was in the

dance competition. I missed getting her picture dancing by 5 minutes, but I was so happy when Hanna and her mother stopped by the House of Gordon tent to tell us she came in 2<sup>nd</sup> place in her dance competition! Such a lovely young lady!

We have one more festival in Ormond Beach which is a two-day event at the end of April and that wraps up the season for us Florida Gordons. We loved seeing new ones and returning members and all the out of state visitors too! Thanks for coming out!

CALIFORNIA— Clint Waugh reports that the House was out for the Queen Mary Games in LA on February 17-18th and also at the Las Vegas, NV Highland Games March 14-15. Look for the Gordon Tent at Costa Mesa May 26th and 27th and of course at Seaside in Ventura October 12-14th!

**BOARD POSITION CHANGES—THANKS BONNIE; WELCOME JEN & DAVID!**



It is with sadness that we must announce that Bonnie Linse has resigned from her position as Treasurer and Membership Secretary for personal reasons.

Bonnie did a stellar job of taking care of our members. She ensured that people received their membership cards and packages within a few days of her receiving their applications and renewals, and she took time to call many of our members to answer their questions and concerns. She also

did a great job at documenting our financial records.

The Board is excited to announce that we have appointed Jen Mills Martin as our Membership Secretary, and David Martin as our Treasurer. Jen has been going gangbusters as a Games Convener under Cynthia Patrick Gordon in Florida and will continue to convene games in North Florida.

Jen has also been editing our Facebook Page and Twitter Page and will continue to post and tweet giving us a constant presence online. David has an accounting and contract negotiation background and will bring his experience to the House. We are happy to have Jen, David (and Payne) with their enthusiasm & organization on board!



# Flowers of the Forest



*Charles Henry Gordon-Lennox, Duke of Richmond and Gordon born on September 19, 1929 and died September 1, 2017, aged 87*

He attended Eton before studying theology at William Temple College, then training and working as a chartered accountant.

He married Susan Monica Grenville-Grey in 1951, and they had three children, Lady Ellinor Caroline, Charles, and Lady Louisa Elizabeth.

In the 1960's the couple made a deliberate decision to adopt children who would not otherwise be fostered or adopted. He stated in a 2008 interview "“I knew certain parts of Africa quite well so it seemed sensible to go for African children. Not everyone in the family was completely happy but after a year or so they came around.” Daughters, Lady Maria, whose father was Ghanaian, and Lady Naomi “Nimmy,” whose father was a South African musician joined the family. Nimmy is a celebrated actress, has worked with the Royal Shakespeare Company and appeared in a succession of television dramas.

In 1969, at the age of 40, he moved into Goodwood, the family estate, with his wife and 5 children, and made it his life's work to ensure the estate's future would be secured for his son and the generations to follow. Twenty years later he acceded to the titles of 10th Duke of Richmond, 10th Duke of Lennox, 10th Duke of Aubigny, and 6th Duke of Gordon (2nd creation). In the time he was custodian of Goodwood he oversaw making the estate more commercial by offering the house for weddings, reopening the aerodrome and establishing a flying school and encouraging organic farming on the land. He built a 91-bedroom hotel, restaurants, two 18-hole golf courses, rebuilt the estate's race-course including a £5million grandstand, and the historic moto-racing circuit, and encouraged his son in establishing the annual Goodwood Festival of Speed! He truly put the glorious back in Glorious Goodwood!

He passed peacefully at Goodwood leaving behind his wife, five children, 13 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.



Our condolences to David Todd, our East Coast Commissioner, on the passing of his mother, **Sharlimae Clouse Todd** on June 6, 2017.

Sharlimae passed on the same day her great-granddaughter, Evelynn was born, one generation passing the torch to another. She was known for telling it like she saw it; one always knew where one stood with her.

She was also known for her baking—especially her pies, and for her love of flowers and most of all her family.



Longtime member of the House of Gordon, **Anne Isabel Gordon Swift**, 95, passed away Sunday, September 17, 2017 at Mary Washington Hospital in Fredericksburg, VA. In 1987 she retired as the Director of Career Planning and Placement from the University of Mary Washington after 32 years of service. Her dedicated service and numerous

professional contacts in business and education brought hundreds of recruiters to campus on a regular basis and provided students with resources for employment opportunities that equaled large universities. Mrs. Swift served in leadership roles in professional organizations on the state, regional and national levels. In 1984 the Fredericksburg Chapter of the Mary Washington College Alumni Association honored her with their Distinguished Service Award. In 1992 she was awarded the MWC Service Award for service to the college and alumni association. She served on the Fredericksburg Architectural Review Board, was a member of Historic Fredericksburg Foundation and had served as president of the Fredericksburg SPCA. She was a staunch supporter of the Virginia Gordons and will be well missed.

**DAVID HAROLD AITKEN, 11/1/1937 - 11/9/2017 Otisville**—age 80, died Thursday, November 9, 2017 at his residence. David was born on 1 November 1937 to David and Geneva (Thurston) Aitken. He was a member of the Otisville United Methodist Church and enjoyed hunting, fishing, bowling, golfing, traveling, and going out to eat. David had an incredible sense of direction and could give directions to anywhere in the state of Michigan without a map. He is survived by his children: David (Liz) Aitken, Deb (Tom) Callison, Jeff (Sherry) Standridge, Jeff (Sherry) Aitken, and Mary Aitken; grandchildren: Megan and Zach, Corey and Lindsey, Kaine and Christa, Nick and Chelsey, Kevin and Skye, Kerry, and Chase; and great-grandchildren; Shaylee, Addie, Grayson, and Gwen. Our condolences to Kaine and his family on their loss. Our condolences to Kaine & family.



**Mary Lucy Boyette Maver, 94**, of Pensacola, FL, passed away on Saturday, March 24, 2018. She was born February 10, 1924 in Santa Rosa County, FL to Jessie Oliver Boyette and Florida Venice Hamilton Boyette. She married David Blair Maver Jr. on January 29, 1943 on the Naval Air Training Base Opa Locka, FL. Married to a Naval Aviator, they moved frequently from Naval Air Station to Naval Air Station. She was devoted to her family and church. She loved spending time with her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She loved gardening and cooking. Our prayers are with

**Mr. Houston Ham Dodson**, age 65, of Elba, Ala., died Wednesday, March 28, 2018, at Flowers Hospital in Dothan, AL. Survivors include his daughter: Jennifer (David) Martin, Enterprise, AL.; a sister: Sherry Young, Elba, AL; four grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, great-nieces, great-nephews, and fishing buddies.

Our condolences to Jen & family!



# Welcome Wee Ones!



Kaine (Michigan convener) and Christa Aitken welcomed their daughter, **Guinevere Elise Aitken**, on the stormy night of the 22nd of June, 2017. At 11 weeks premature and an almighty 2 lbs. 5 oz, she fought hard with the strength of a Gordon Goddess and is now thriving.

Gwen is looking forward to a summer full of fun at her first Highland Games season at the MichiGordon tent.



Welcome to the Gordon clan **Evelynn Ava Todd**, daughter of Daniel & Raquel of Richmond, VA, and granddaughter of David & Lois Todd. Evelynn was born on June 11, 2017.



*Whisht wee bairn and dinnae greet  
Mither's here tae shish ye  
She'll sing a sang sae saft an' sweet  
Tae ye hae fa'en ower*

*Whan your een hae claesed she'll slip awa  
An' lea' ye in God's care  
For she kens he'll aye watch ower ye  
Tae ye wak for her aince mair*

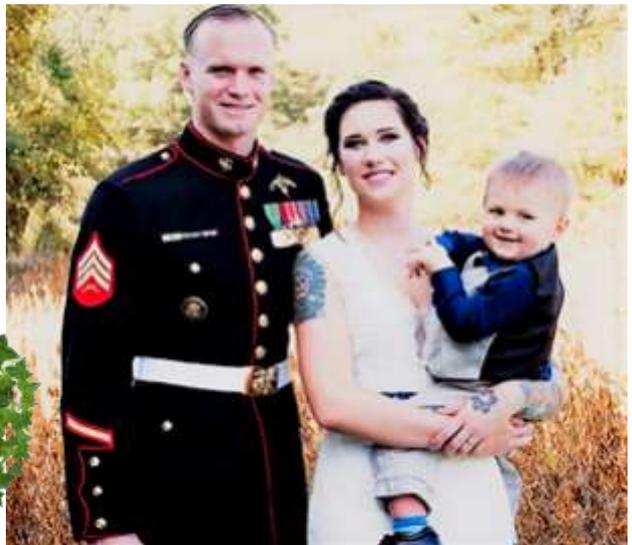


Kenn & Susan Gordon (Convener for the Gulf States Area) welcomed their beautiful Gordon Goddess by choice, Stella Gordon, into their family this past Spring. With three brothers, she will be well loved! Now that is a good looking family!



*Welcome to the Clan!*

Congratulations to Sgt. J. Aaron Todd on his marriage and welcome to the Clan to Bridget and her son, Roman! Married last October, the couple is settled in North Carolina.



# Charles O. Gordon Scholarship



**Henry Marshall of Dunedin, FL.** Henry is a 15-year-old Highland Dancer who enthusiasm and love of the Scottish Arts in his community has seen him volunteering many hours outside of his dancing practice and competitions. His goal of attending the Oho Scottish Arts School this summer to hone his craft is one we hope to help him reach with our scholarship, and we hope to see him continue to progress in his art.

**Cameron Reid of Loveland, OH** is a 13-year-old Highland Dancer and a first generation Scottish-American. She has a love and joy of the dance that truly impressed us and hopes to one day become a teacher and judge. In 2013 she was awarded the Best Overseas Dancer as Luss, Scotland, and placed in the Championship at Grandfather Mountain the past two years. We expect to see great things of this young lady!



**Sebastian Arguelles of Houston, TX.** Sebastian is an 11-year-old Highland Drummer who is competing in Grade 2 Individual Snare. Last year in the under 14 category he placed 4th at the World Solo Drumming Championship in Glasgow, Scotland. Sebastian is a dedicated and thoughtful young man with high goals for himself and we hope to see him go far in developing his talent.

We have awarded each of our recipients with a \$500.00 cash grant to aid them in their travels, or lessons. We are looking forward to seeing them at the Gordon tent!

# The Epic Project



## **The Epic Project Recipient 2018 is Filemon Tan of Houston, TX age 17**

Filemon is currently attending, Saint Thomas Episcopal School in Houston Texas. He is the current Pipe Major of the St. Thomas Episcopal School Pipe Band. The Band has toured around the United States and the UK competing in Pipe Band Competitions. Where they have a very successful rate of wins.

Filemon is a Grade 1 Piper and competes across the USA, he is very successful in his young piping career. At the Piping Competition at "Winter Storm" in Missouri, Co-Chair

of The Epic Project Richard King first heard Filemon play the pipes. Filemon was recommended to Richard by Piping Judge Ken Eller.

Filemon will receive Uniforms or "Kits" from MyKiltmaker.com owned by Susan Rose a House of Gordon Member. The use of which, he will be able to use to further his career as a Bagpiper. He will also receive Gifts of Piping Accessories for use as well from HighlandReeds.com. owned by Bruce Hitching B.E.M.

St. Andrews University of North Carolina has added to his Gifting a very generous Scholarship to the University arranged for by Bill Caudell.

The "Main Clan" Sponsor of The Epic project this year is the Clan MacKay, Chaired by Jamie Chambers. The Tartan for this year is MacKay of Strathnaver Weathered.

As for next year House of Gordon has again stepped up to the plate with another "Main Clan" Sponsorship of The Epic Project with one of the Gordon Tartans as the 2019 Tartan.

The Epic Project has become one of the Premier Scholarships in the Pipe Band Community and is now known World Wide.

Susan Gordon Rose, Chair of The Epic Project

## Alexander Gordon Laing Timbuktu, True Love & Tragedy



His is a story that changed Africa forever marking the beginning of the Scramble for Africa by European nations to colonize and control the great continent. It is a story only told through his love for his wife Emma; a tragic romance that would have even Romeo and Juliet in tears for the couple, yet few know of Alexander Gordon Laing.

Known by his contemporaries as Gordon Laing, he was born in Edinburgh to William Laing and Margaret Gordon on 27 December 1793, the third of eleven children, and was Christened at St. Cuthbert's on New Year's Eve. His father was a school teacher and while the family were not very well

off, they were well connected. Margaret's father is rumored to be the product of an unrecognized marriage of Cosmo Gordon, 3rd Duke of Gordon, and a French lady, her maternal grandfather was James Chrystie, Provost of Stirling; the brother next to her in age was General Gabriel Gordon. His father, William Laing, founded a school of classical education where Gordon received his initial education and subsequently he attended Edinburgh University. He assisted his father running the Academy, and for a short time served as a school master in Newcastle. But although he excelled at academics, he longed for a life of adventure.

In 1809 he volunteered for military service as an ensign in the Prince of Wales Volunteers. Two years later he went to Barbados as clerk to his maternal uncle Colonel (later General) Gabriel Gordon, then deputy quarter-master general, hoping for a transfer to the regular army. He was following in the footsteps of many fellow Scots, for whom the British Empire provided opportunities for social, economic, or political advancement beyond what Scotland's sphere could offer. Through General Sir George Beckwith, governor of Barbados, he

obtained an ensigncy in the York Light Infantry. He was then employed in the West Indies, where he was soon performing the duties of a quartermaster general. A bout of illness followed, during which he recuperated in Scotland for eighteen months on half-pay. However, by 1819, he was fully restored to health and rejoined his regiment.

In 1822 good reports of his competency earned him a promotion to a lieutenancy in the Royal African Corps and he was dispatched to Sierra Leone, where he was sent by the governor, Brigadier General, Sir Charles MacCarthy, to the Mandingo country, with the double objective of opening commerce and working to abolish the slave trade in that region. Later in the same year Laing visited Falaba, the capital of the Sulima country, and ascertained the source of the Rokel. He endeavored to reach the source of the Niger but was stopped by the natives. He was, however enabled to fix it with approximate accuracy. He took an active part in the Ashanti War of 1823-24, which was part of the anti-slavery campaign, earning promotion to Captain and was sent home with the dispatches containing the news of the death in action of Sir Charles MacCarthy. While back in Britain he took the opportunity to publish a book on his explorations and adventures in 1822 titled ***Travels in the Timannee, Kooranko, and Soolima Countries, in Western Africa*** – Alexander Gordon Laing. You can read the eBook free on google books!

The history of European exploration of Inner Africa wasn't exactly stellar – in fact it was dismal. The area was controlled by native tribes and Arab Slave Traders who had extensively explored and exploited the country and people for centuries. In 1788 The Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa was formed in Britain. The individuals who formed this club were inspired in part by one of the few successful British explorers into the African interior, Scotsman James Bruce, who had ventured to Ethiopia in 1769 and reached the source of the Blue Nile. For decades, young European men had been heading into Africa's hostile interior to try to unlock the mysteries within and win fame and fortune. Few came back. Twenty years earlier another Scottish explorer, Mungo Park, had disappeared while also trying to trace the Niger to its mouth. Forty-six Europeans set out on that journey with Park; not one of them survived. Laing felt that he had located the source of the Niger in his earlier explorations and in fact had fairly accurately pinpointed it. He proposed to follow it downriver to its delta, finally ending the mystery of where it spilled into the sea. Joseph Banks, president of the African Association supported his project, hoping that the expedition would reveal the location of Timbuktu. This support prompted Henry, 3rd Earl Bathurst, then secretary for the colonies, to commission Captain Laing to undertake a journey, to locate the fabled City of Gold, Timbuktu, and then to locate the source, survey and chart the course of the Niger basin. Lord Bathurst wanted

the British to beat the French in the race for the fabled city, launched by the French Geographical Society in 1824 offering a prize of 10,000 francs for the first person to reach Timbuktu and "live to tell the tale." In fact, he also commissioned Hugh Clapperton, expecting that the two men would cooperate. Instead, Clapperton, a far more experienced explorer, felt resentful that the Colonial Office had commissioned a "neophyte" like Laing, and planned his own mission coming from the south. Laing for his part felt that Clapperton was part of a conspiracy to ensure that he never reach Timbuktu. By July of 1825 Clapperton had arrived at Kano and thence the Fulani capital Sokoto. The Fulani were now at war with al-Kaneimi, and Sultan Bello refused him permission to leave. After many months' detention, afflicted by malaria, depression, and dysentery, Clapperton's luck ran out and he died on a very unlucky date—Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1827.

Now promoted to the rank of Major, Gordon Laing felt it was his turn at adventure, fame and fortune; ever self-confident, he wrote to his parents, "I shall do more than has ever been done before and shall show myself to be what I have ever considered myself, a man of enterprise and genius." Laing's plan was bold and direct: he would sail to the port of Tripoli, brush up on his Arabic, arrange for money, supplies, and hire a guide and camels. From Tripoli he would head south into the blistering Sahara Desert travelling from one watering hole to the next until he found his city of gold. Then he would press on to the Niger River. Laing left England in February 1825 for Tripoli on the North Coast of Africa, and the start of a great and tragic adventure and love story.



Hanmer Warrington's (British Consul General) Villa by the seaside near Tripoli—used as the Consulate at times when the city became disease ridden.

Upon arriving in Tripoli, Laing reported to the British Consul, Hanmer Warrington who was tasked by the government to assist Laing in his preparations for the journey. And then Gordon Laing did the most unexpected thing imaginable for such an ambitious young soldier set on making a name for himself, he fell head over heels in love with the “delicate, flower-like” daughter of the British Consul, Emma Warrington. For Emma too, it was love at first sight. Within a few short weeks the two became inseparable, and Gordon Laing very quickly proposed marriage and she accepted. Her father was not well disposed to give his daughter to the young soldier with little to recommend him as a good provider. He wrote to Lord Bathurst. “Although I am aware that Major Laing is a very gentlemanly, honourable and a good man still I must allow a more wild, enthusiastic and romantic attachment never before existed,” He refused permission for her to marry, but Emma wheedled and cajoled, and finally threatened to kill herself if she were not allowed to marry her man, and so he relented.

Hanmer was a sly one, and although always proud of his ability, as one role of his position as Consul General, to join British citizens in marriage, he was not going to allow HIS daughter to consummate a civil marriage. He made them promise that they would not consummate their marriage until they had been married by a Church of England priest – which he knew would not be until after Laing returned from his adventure. If he sought to protect Emma from grief, it was cruel beyond belief to allow the ardently passionate young couple the commitment of marriage, but not the fulfillment – even Romeo & Juliet seized their moment of wedded bliss. Hanmer was betting he wouldn't make it back. He wrote a very sanctimonious letter about the marriage and his part in not allowing them to truly live as husband and wife to Lord Bathurst. Some have speculated that he was afraid they may find at some later date that they were not legally married, but more likely he was hoping to dissuade them from marrying at all. Others speculate that he wanted to keep the option to annul the marriage as he was a man of great ambitions (although little talent) himself and thought he could find a better husband for his daughter. It is interesting to note that he spent many years as Consul General in Tripoli, and even though there were many instances where his actions, and diplomatic infractions would have normally meant recall, he was never recalled, and continued to live in a state of luxury well above his station without censure. The reason for this may well be found in the many rumors of the time that his wife, Jane Eliza Pryce, was the illegitimate daughter of the Prince Regent (later King George IV), it may well have been that his own father-in-law wanted to keep him far away and out of sight!

Throughout this whirlwind romance Laing and Warrington were busy planning the trip to Tripoli, searching out a guide, arranging for fund, bribes for the local sheiks and tribes along the way, supplies and transport. Even in this Hanmer pulled a few fast ones on Laing, recommending one set of numbers in a budget to Laing for his approval and then omitting a few thousand dollars on the same budget estimates he sent back to London, knowing full well that Laing was drawing funds based on the first set of numbers and that the revised information would not reach London until Laing was underway. Whether this was thoughtless or deliberate has been much debated. Given that all of this was playing out as Emma was fighting for her father's approval for her marriage to Laing seems to point to a deliberateness in his actions. Hanmer held out against the marriage until the last. The couple were married on 14 July 1825, just two days before Laing's departure on his mission leaving his bride behind in her father's home. Love-struck Laing later wrote to relatives at home in Edinburgh, urging them to stay in touch with his new wife.

"I hope you have written to my dearest Emma, the most amiable girl that God ever created. She is, indeed, such a being as I had formed in my mind's eye but had never before seen and has just as much common sense as has fallen to the lot of your most worthy elder brother."

He wrote copious letters to Emma some as much as 5000 words long, telling her of every aspect of his journey and sending them back along the trek by camel every two weeks. These letters are the only papers that remain telling of his trip, and they give such great detail that you can piece together what his day to day life was like. Unfortunately for him, it was not a pretty picture for the most part.

Laing left Tripoli with a small group of brave supporters: a Caribbean-born servant called Jack le Bore who'd been with him for years; two African ship's carpenters named Roger and Harry; a freed slave called Bongola; and a Jewish interpreter, Abraham Nahun. Outside the city's gates, they teamed up with Sheikh Babani, a merchant from the desert who Warrington had procured to guide Laing to Timbuktu in ten weeks and who promised to guarantee his safety. The intrepid party moved steadily south under the brain-boiling sun, travelling along trade routes that have been used by desert caravans for centuries. Temperatures at midday hit 120F. Their drinking water turned hot and muddy in their goatskin pouches. Food was grim-smelling patties made of dried fish and camel's milk. They were forced to travel hundreds of miles out of their way to avoid trails

stalked by bandits. It took Laing and his men eight weeks just to get to Ghadames, an oasis town still more than a thousand miles north of Timbuktu. Sick and exhausted, they rested there for nearly two months.

In his letters, Laing repeatedly begged his reluctant father-in-law to send him a miniature of Emma, "else I might go mad." When he received the portrait, he was tormented thinking Emma looked pale and unhappy. He worried she was ill and pining for him, and in a panic, he wrote Warrington that he was immediately returning to Tripoli. Thinking to assuage his fears, Warrington wrote "Your wife dear Emma you may believe me is well & happy as it is her duty to be." Laing suffered terribly from the thoughtless comment putting familial duty above any claim of affection or sentiment. Hot on the heels of this letter Laing received a letter from Warrington reporting the Colonial Secretary's extreme annoyance at the estimated cost of the expedition having been greatly exceeded. (This was caused by Hanmer's having hidden several thousand in costs by omitting items or reducing items in the estimate he sent to the Colonial Home Office. Of course, this caused great anxiety on Laing's part at a point that he could do nothing about it but determine to return to Tripoli. Upon receiving the letter from Laing on this subject he was horrified and wrote a letter that was meant to be an abject apology encouraging him



Tripoli to In Salah = 1,105.2 miles  
In Salah to Timbuktu = 1,361.6 miles

onward in his mission but spoil it by expressing the hope that Laing and Clapperton might meet and return together. Of course, that didn't exactly sit well with Laing as that would mean that Clapperton had beat him to his goals of tracing the Niger and reaching Timbuktu! Many historians have pointed out the careless preparations in the expedition, blaming Laing's inexperience, however it was Warrington's primary responsibility as the person with the contacts with the local leaders to make these preparations as he had been tasked by the government. Laing's letters indicate that he believed that there was a conspiracy against his success in

favor of Clapperton. Considering that Hanmer Warrington highly praised Clapperton and generally denigrated Laing, he may have had a point.

As it happened, it was not Warrington that persuaded Laing to continue his journey, but a comet he saw in the sky. It filled him with confidence. "I regard it as a happy omen," he wrote, "it beckons me on & binds me to the termination of the Niger and to Timbuktu." He received further encouragement in the news that Clapperton's expedition was finding its own share of troubles.

Four weeks later, in December 1825, the Laing's small caravan arrived at In Salah, a small oasis settlement in what is now the central part of Algeria. Laing had been on the trans-Saharan caravan route for five months, but at In Salah he faced yet another long delay. The whole town debated on whether it was safe for him to proceed.



Tuareg—circa 1821

The scuttlebutt was that the two factions of the Tuareg (a large Berber ethnic confederation with a reputation of plundering trade caravans) were feuding and consequently stepping up their attacks in the desert. Dozens of Arab merchants had been sitting tight at In Salah for months, waiting for the threat to pass. Everyone encouraged Laing do likewise. Only a madman would strike out into the desert now, they said. Timbuktu would have to wait, so Laing waited. Christmas came and went, the New Year arrived.

Tiring of waiting, he tried to persuade some of the merchants in town to move south with him. When that didn't work, he announced that he would go it alone, and shamed into action by the mad Christian in their midst, the cautious Arab traders finally decided it was time to pack up their gear and move on. On 9 January, Laing left In Salah, not alone but with a caravan of forty-five men and one hundred camels. He thought there was safety in number, but he was wrong, SO wrong.

Towards the end of the month, twenty heavily armed strangers began silently flanking the caravan. They wore the blue robes of the Tuareg, their faces veiled with only a slit for the eyes. No one wanted them around – everyone was scared to tell them to go, so the uninvited escort accompanied Laing's caravan through the wilderness to a filthy, mosquito-infested oasis called Wadi Ahnet. And it was there, overnight between 2- 3 February 1826, that he was betrayed, savagely assaulted and left for dead.

The Tuareg waited till Laing was asleep before surrounding his tent and firing off two musket volleys, hitting Laing in the hip. And before he could reach his sword the attackers were on him, hacking at his head and body with their sabers. They kept chopping until Laing stopped moving. Laing's servants tried to intervene. Roger, the carpenter, and Abraham, the interpreter, were killed. The second chippie, Harry, was wounded in the leg. A camel driver called Hamet was crippled by a cutlass. Laing's long-time servant Jack le Bore and the ex-slave Bongola saved themselves by fleeing into the surrounding dunes.

After plundering Laing's tent, the Tuareg rode off on their camels, hooting and jeering at their victim whilst celebrating their take. None of the other travelers in the caravan was robbed or hurt that night; none lifted a finger to help poor Laing, whether they all colluded with the bandits to ensure their safety or were too afraid to bring destruction upon themselves or some combination thereof we will never know. But we do know that the man who had been well paid to guide him through the Sahar in safety, Sheikh Babani, was behind the bloodshed. Babani had struck a deal with the Tuarag, agreeing to stand aside while the bandits murdered the explorer. In return, he was to get a share of the Scotsman's belongings. But Laing spoiled things by refusing to die - despite being left looking like a grizzly bear had mauled him.

His wounds were gruesome in the extreme. He sustained five deep sabre cuts on his right arm which smashed the bones in his wrist, broke three fingers and almost severed the hand. His left arm was also broken and slashed in three places. There was a deep gash on the back of Laing's neck, another on his left leg - and a musket ball was lodged in his hip. But perhaps the

worst damage was about the head: three sabre cuts on the left temple had chipped away bits of bone; another blow had fractured his jawbone; his left ear was split in two and left dangling; his right temple had a gaping wound. In total, Laing suffered twenty-four injuries in the night attack at Wadi Ahnet, eighteen of them severe with much blood loss.

The next morning the Arab merchants in his party left without him. Only his surviving servants stuck around to help. But giving up wasn't an option now. As soon as he was strong enough, Laing asked his men to lift him onto a camel and strap him into an upright position. Then the bloodied explorer and his comrades continued their merciless journey across the burning sands. Somehow Laing rode on in that desperate state for 400 miles, flopping about on top of his camel, sometimes weeping in agony and despair. It was an incredible feat of endurance for such a savagely wounded man. Laing feared he would be disfigured for life. He dreaded his beloved Emma's reaction to his scars.

In April he arrived at the oasis town of Azaud, where he was welcomed by an Arab chief called Sheikh Mokhtar. Laing stayed here three months to try to recover. But shortly a dysentery epidemic broke out in the town. The disease carried off his servants Jack le Bore and Harry the carpenter. Sheikh Mokhtar also succumbed. Laing got sick too, but dreams of returning to Emma in glorious victory of accomplishing his mission gave him the strength to survive. Hamet the camel driver, had reached his limit, and headed for home, now Bongola was his only remaining companion.

The horror of it all started to get to Laing and he wrote a letter to his father-in-law back in Tripoli in a weird way of trying to bolster his confidence and determination. He alone was destined to get to Timbuktu, he claimed. "I make no vain glorious assertion when I say that it will never be visited by a Christian man after me!" he boasted. And then, brushing off warnings of more yet danger ahead, he set off on the final leg of his epic journey.

On 13 August 1826, the much-battered Laing finally approached the city walls of Timbuktu, his "far-famed capital of Central Africa". A journey he had expected to take a few weeks had lasted three hundred and ninety-nine days. He'd travelled two thousand miles through the most hostile and unforgiving terrain in Africa. He'd faced sandstorms, life-destroying heat, loneliness, hunger, thirst and extreme violence. He must have been gutted when he at last set eyes on the legendary "city of gold" and realized it was little more than a dusty grimy little and very poor town. Once a place of dazzling riches, in its heyday merchants from across North

Africa had descended on its vast markets to trade in gemstones, ivory, gold and human beings. When Timbuktu's greatest ruler, Mansa Musa, passed through Cairo in 1324 on his way to Mecca he was accompanied by twelve thousand silk-clad slaves and eighty camels laden with gold. Word spread to medieval Europe of Timbuktu's unimaginable wealth and the city's reputation was sealed.

But its glory days were long, long gone by the time Laing arrived. He found no

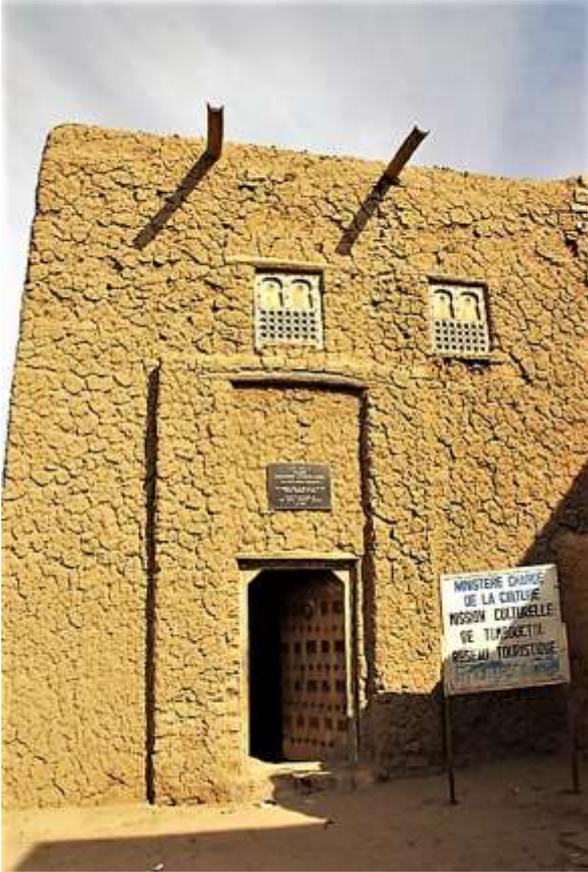


palaces studded with gems, worse yet, Laing found that he wasn't welcome. Sultan Bello, the region's powerful ruler, made it clear he didn't want uninvited Scotsmen hanging around his manor. Laing stayed in Timbuktu for thirty-five days, spending his time studying old Islamic manuscripts. But on 21 September 1826, he wrote to Emma's father saying Timbuktu had become "exceedingly unsafe" and it was time to move on. That letter is the last anyone ever heard of Alexander Gordon Laing.

We know he did leave Timbuktu as planned. Fearing Sultan Bello, he abandoned his idea of finding the river Niger and instead joined a caravan of Arabs heading to Morocco. Laing travelled north with them for two days. Then he was betrayed for a second time and butchered by a man who was supposed to be acting as his guide and protector, Ahmadu Labeida.

Laing's papers, and journals were never recovered. Hanmer accused the French (who also wanted to reach Timbuktu) of interference going so far as to accuse them of paying for his demise and having procured Laing's journal. However, there has never been any evidence for this claim. René Caillié, a French explorer, reached Timbuktu two years after Laing and by returning alive was

able to claim the 10,000-franc prize offered by the Société de Géographie for the feat. Both men were awarded the Gold Medal of the Society for 1830. In 1903, the French government placed a tablet bearing Laing's name and the date of his visit on the house occupied by him during his 38-day stay in Timbuktu. The tablet was replaced in 1963 by the Royal African Society. This house, located in the Djingareiber district, inside the old town, was declared a National Heritage site by decree of 18 December 1992.



There are two versions of Laing's demise. According to the one version relayed to a French army officer in Timbuktu nearly a century after the event by an old man in his eighties who claimed to be Labeida's nephew, the explorer had gone on ahead and was resting in the shade of a tree with his two servants, Bongola and an unnamed Arab boy. Labeida and three accomplices suddenly rode up and began threatening him. Labeida demanded Laing become a Muslim. Gordon Laing, being a devout Christian refused. There was a fierce stand-off. Then two of the gang grabbed Laing's arms, Labeida drove a spear into his chest – and the fourth cut off his head. The young boy was also murdered, and the two bodies

abandoned at the foot of the tree. The attackers also murdered the Arab lad. Then reportedly, they divided Laing's money, burnt his papers out of fear they contained magic. The old man claimed that his uncle had often boasted of how he slaughtered the "Christian infidel." A dramatic story for sure, but most likely just that, a good story.

A more likely version comes from Laing's surviving servant, Bongola, who arrived

in Tripoli two years after Laing's death. Bongola testified that Labeida's gang struck at night, stabbing Laing and the Arab boy to death as they lay sleeping. Bongola was wounded in the struggle but escaped. In the morning he found his master's decapitated body – it was covered in deep sabre cuts.

The news of Laing's grisly death broke Emma's heart and destroyed her health. Her father forced her into marrying his vice-consul, Thomas Wood, and they were soon after relocated to Italy. There was no stopping the depression and degrading health brought on by the shock of her beloved husband's murder and Emma died of consumption in Pisa in October 1829, aged twenty-eight – just four years after kissing her intrepid husband goodbye and watching him ride off into the African desert in search of his city of gold, and his place in history.



Left: Close-up of the plaque on the Alexander Gordon Laing House in Timbuktu.

Below: Today, Timbuktu looks much as it did when Gordon Laing was there.



## THOMAS AND MARY (POLLY) GORDON

Sharon Marsalis

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In 1971 a book titled A SEARCH FOR "POLLY" was published. It contained compiled info on the related Marsalis and Gordon families gathered over 40 years by many dedicated researchers from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Mississippi and Louisiana. "Polly" referred to Mary Magdalene Gordon (1784 NC – 1862 MS) who married, probably in Georgia, Peter Hutchins Marsalis between 1800 and 1804. She has been assumed to be the sister of Thomas Gordon (1771 NC – 1852 LA). Assumptions made over the last 100 years have proven erroneous. In 1971, everyone wanted to prove that Mary (Polly) Gordon Marsalis and her assumed brother Thomas Gordon were indeed brother and sister and perhaps descendants of one of the Wilkes County, NC Gordons. A Georgia genealogist decided that Thomas and his assumed sister Mary probably were from an unknown marriage or unknown line that was descended from the Wilkes County, NC Gordons. She also found a Moses Gordon in Wilkes County, Georgia who, in his will, mentioned a daughter Polly. She assumed that Moses was a brother or son from this unknown line. She had determined this after scouring every Gordon she could find in early Georgia.

The first mention of Thomas Gordon is his 1795 marriage to Lydia/Lette Prestridge 25 May 1795 in Lexington, Oglethorpe County, Georgia. Her name is written as Lydia Prestage on the marriage list copied from a book that had marriages between 3 March 1794 and 20 January 1800. Although Thomas Gordon married Lette Prestridge, daughter of John Prestage/Prestridge in Oglethorpe County, John Prestridge, like many settlers of upper Georgia, had moved from Virginia.

The father of Thomas Gordon and Mary (Polly) Gordon Marsalis has still not been found. As with most families the proverbial brick walls are encountered in the generations before 1750.

Several North Carolina and South Carolina Gordon lines, other than those of Wilkes County, NC originated in Spotsylvania County, Virginia, are now being considered. Most of the first settlers of upper Georgia came from North Carolina and Virginia; yet there were many more Gordon families in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia in colonial days than is generally recognized. As with all families the widespread use of the same first names adds to the confusion but can also help in naming patterns. That there was a Wilkes County, NC and a Wilkes County, GA with some of the same records claimed by both states adds to the confusion. Y-DNA test results have shown some matches with a

Thomas Gordon descendant traced back to Ireland, Canada, Pennsylvania and Georgia. FTDNA's TiP Report has estimated that the Georgia line could have shared a Most Recent Common Ancestor at least 3 generations ago. All the other matches range from 4 to 6 generations ago for sharing a common ancestor.

From the early 1800s, descendants of the Wilkes County, NC family are found in Jones County, Georgia living near Thomas Gordon and one Henry Gordon (1780 NC – 1866 GA) whose descendants are the closest Gordon match to Thomas' descendants— have the same brick wall – who was Henry's father? Was he of the Wilkes County, NC family? Was he named for the Henry family who fought on King's Mountain, SC along with several other Gordons? Was he from the James and Nanny Gordon family that lived in York County, SC? Was he the Henry Gordon mentioned in the book *Gordons of the Deep South*? Was he the Henry Gordon on the 1807 tax list for Baldwin County, Georgia living next door to Peter H. Marsalis? Was he from a Virginia line? On and on the questions go.

Some Gordon names found in early Georgia who were originally from North Carolina or Virginia:

Washington and Franklin Counties, Georgia, were formed in 1784. Below are Gordons found on 1784 Warrants for land in Georgia. Most of the names were from North Carolina, including Charles, Chapman and George Gordon of the Wilkes county, North Carolina family.

- 1) **Thomas Gordon**. 2. (Listed twice?), May 17, 1840 Quantum (acreage)
- 2) **Ambrose Gordon**, May 17, 588 Quantum (acreage)
- 3) **Thomas Gordon**, 739 Quantum (acreage)
- 4) April 1784 State of Georgia, Richmond County, "**Chapman Gordon** from the State of NC appeared before us and made an oath that he has four besides himself for which he never received land in Head Wright in this state and prays that land may be granted him from the same in Washington and Franklin Countys..." 400 acres Washington Co(unt) May 17, 206 Quantum (Chapman Gordon was not married until 1786 so the "4 besides himself" could have included a family member or a slave.)
- 5) **Col. Charles Gordon**, citizen of NC 1000 acres Washington, (GA) 16 plus himself, 7 Apr 1784 May 17, 1621 Quantum

- 6) **George Gordon of NC**, 16 plus himself, April 1784, Washington and Franklin Counties, 1000 acres May 17, 913 Quantum
- 7) **Jessie Gordon**, 287 acres Washington, July 22, 1784. Battalion of Minute Men. NOT an inhabitant of GA at the time May 17, 913 Quantum
- 8) **Alexander Gordon** – part of 200 acres in Wilkes and part in Elbert, (GA) Long Creek Headright
- 9) **Alexander Gordon**, from the State of NC – 12 in family plus himself. Planning to remove to GA, 12 May 1784. Warrant was issued Wilkes Co, GA. Not claimed before (Different or same Alexander Gordon as above??) May 17, 1259 Quantum

The rise of the Internet and the advent of DNA has made genealogy more complex and confounding. The vast amount of data available on the Internet has sowed confusion. So much data is unverified or just plain wrong but has been passed on as family lore and posted hundreds of times as fact. On popular genealogical sites such as Ancestry.com and at Family Search there are multitudes, of family trees which do not include sources. Many SAR and DAR lineages also contain gross errors and are now being examined more closely. Published lineages have mixed up Thomas and Mary with another Thomas A. Gordon and a Mary. This erroneous lineage is found in many on-line trees.

Many of us hope to find verifiable paper trail and DNA matches. A common expression is that DNA does not lie. A man's bloodline will go back to the progenitor of his line. Sometimes a bloodline is interrupted by an adoption, formal or informal, or another event, such as a name change, again legal or informal, and will show a surname different than always believed. A good, verified or documented paper trail goes hand in hand with DNA results when trying to prove ancestry. DNA alone is not enough, but it's a great starting place for determining roots and branches.

### **Bottom line:**

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**If you have researched Gordons in Virginia who subsequently settled in North Carolina or Georgia or are a descendant of Thomas or Mary "Polly" Gordon Marsalis and have researched the line, contact me so we can solve this problem.**

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## HOW DO I INTERPRET MY atDNA OR FAMILY FINDER RESULTS? *Jim Gordon— GORDON DNA PROJECT*

Essentially, the answer is: you don't because it's already been done for you. The thing is, we don't necessarily need to understand how DNA works for it to be useful - so the way that FTDNA and other DNA testing companies shield their users from the detail, frustrating as it may be for experts, makes things a lot easier for beginners. After all, when it comes to DNA, most of us are beginners, even though we may have been researching our family tree in the conventional way for 40 or 50 years.

They say that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and that's never been truer. Millions of DNA tests have been sold to people who know nothing about genealogy, yet most seasoned family historians have yet to test themselves, let alone their cousins (which is when it can pay off). So here are some simple facts for those of you are still hesitating:

**Anyone can take a DNA test** - autosomal (at) DNA tests, can be taken by both men and women

- **It doesn't hurt** – FTDNA asks for a scraping from the inside of your cheek. Other testing companies ask you to spit in a tube.
- **You don't have to upload your tree** - but it will make it easier for you and easier for your cousins too
- **You will get thousands of matches with cousins** - in fact you'll have so many matches with 'genetic cousins' that you won't have time to look at them all; the biggest problem is figuring out how you're connected to them, and that's where traditional records-based research is crucially important, and why.

**DNA complements conventional research** - it isn't a substitute for looking up records, and it certainly isn't a quick fix for somebody who is too busy or too lazy (they'd be better off hiring a professional genealogist)

**Ancestry DNA** isn't the cheapest test, but they have by far the biggest database of results. Buying a different test because it's cheaper is a false economy - I'm sure you don't want to end up like some, having to test all over again to get access to the thousands of cousins who tested with Ancestry. The best approach is to test your atDNA with Ancestry, transfer your results for free to FTDNA and then order the Y-DNA for your male line.

*Tip: when you test with Ancestry you can transfer your results to other websites, such as GEDmatch and FTDNA. But it doesn't work the other way around - if you test with different company you can't transfer your results to Ancestry.*

No matter how much experience you might have as a family historian, it would be understandable if, when the results of your DNA test came through, you were completely flummoxed about what to do next. There's a simple reason for this - we're used to working backwards from what we already know, so there's a clearly defined path, i.e.: find our ancestor's baptism to discover (or confirm) who their parents were, then find the parents' marriage, then find the baptisms of the parents and so on, working back a generation at a time.

### The challenge

When we're matched with a genetic cousin, someone who appears to have inherited an identical segment of DNA, we're faced with a very different challenge. Most of the matches we make with DNA cousins will be many generations removed, since we have many more distant cousins than we do close cousins. The final column of the table below indicates roughly how many cousins you

| Degree of cousinship | Expected amount of IBD (cM) | Chance of detecting cousin | Expected # of cousins | Expected # of detectable cousins |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1                    | 900                         | 100                        | 5                     | 5                                |
| 2                    | 225                         | 100                        | 28                    | 28                               |
| 3                    | 56                          | 98                         | 175                   | 172                              |
| 4                    | 14                          | 71                         | 1,570                 | 1,115                            |
| 5                    | 3.5                         | 32                         | 17,300                | 5,536                            |
| 6                    | 0.88                        | 11                         | 174,000               | 19,140                           |
| 7                    | 0.22                        | 3.2                        | 1,000,000             | 32,000                           |
| 8                    | 0.055                       | 0.91                       | 5,000,000             | 45,500                           |
| 9                    | 0.014                       | 0.2                        | 20,000,000            | 40,000                           |
| 10                   | 0.0034                      | 0.04                       | 80,000,000            | 32,000                           |

might expect to find if you and they all took an atDNA test:

Based on Table 2 from: Henn BM, Hon L, Macpherson JM, Eriksson N, Saxonov S, Pe'er I, et al. (2012) *Cryptic Distant Relatives Are Common in Both Isolated and Cosmopolitan Genetic Samples*. PLoS ONE 7(4): e34267. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0034267

Revised using Ancestry DNA estimates for the chances of detecting cousins and the expected number of 1st to 6th cousins; the numbers for 7th to 10th cousins are guesstimates

Of course, in practice only a small fraction of your cousins will have tested - even Ancestry, the biggest provider of autosomal tests, have only sold about 10 million tests - but you can nevertheless reckon that the cousins you're matched with will be distributed roughly in proportion to the figures shown above. In other words, over 99% of your matches will be with relatives who are at best 5th cousins and could well be distant cousins.

*Tip: Ancestry doesn't show any of your atDNA matches as more distant than '5th to 8th cousin', but it's very likely that amongst them there are many who are more distant - possibly as many as half of them. On the other hand, FTDNA does not go as far as Ancestry in cousinship. If a relationship is greater than 6<sup>th</sup> cousin, the relationship will be termed "Distant cousin." Once you get beyond 3rd cousins the length of the shared segment(s) is only a very rough guide to how closely you are related - you could share a 7centiMorgan (a measurement of at DNA) segment with a distant cousin, but no detectable DNA with a 5th cousin.*

You and your 5th cousin share the same 4th-great grandparents (6 generations back). Now, I don't know about you, but I certainly can't say who all 64 of my 4<sup>th</sup> Great grandparents were - indeed, I don't even know for sure who all my 3d Great grandparents were. I've got several 'brick walls' in the last 5 generations - and most researchers, including my DNA cousins, are probably in the same situation. Go back another generation and there are even more gaps - and it just gets worse from then on.

In other words, most of the ancestors that link us to our DNA cousins are on the other side of a 'brick wall' - and this could be a 'brick wall' in your own tree, in your cousin's tree, or even in both trees. What a challenge!

### **The reward**

At this stage it's important to remind ourselves *why* we took a DNA test! Surely the primary reason we tested was to knock down 'brick walls' that conventional research couldn't breach? If our 'brick walls' have resisted our efforts for years (or even decades), the opportunity to knock them down using DNA is surely well worth grasping - even though it will mean that we have to adopt a new and unfamiliar strategy, and utilize somewhat different techniques?

### *Before you get your results*

Make sure that you've done all the conventional, records-based, research you possibly can.

Complete your *My Ancestors* page, ensuring that you have entered ALL of the cousins (no matter how distant) that you can find on the 1881 Census. Yes, it might take you an hour or two, but skipping this important step could cost your tens or even hundreds of hours when you come to analyze your DNA matches.

*Tip: start in 1790 and trace each of your branches (sometimes referred to as collateral lines) through to 1881.*

Remember, DNA testing isn't a substitute for records-based research - you need to do both to have a reasonable chance of success. Each builds on the other - if you only do one you're almost certainly going to fail.

### *How to process your DNA matches*

I'm going to assume for this article that you tested with Ancestry - but don't stop reading if you tested elsewhere because I'll be covering techniques you can use, though not as effectively, at Family Tree DNA and GEDmatch.

At Ancestry you'll typically have 10000 to 20000 matches with cousins, and of those all but about 1% will be with 'distant' cousins, i.e. where the estimated relationship is 5th cousin or more distant. So you might think that the best strategy might be to focus on the 1% on the basis that if you can't make head or tail of those matches, your chance of resolving the more distant matches is negligible. Wrong, totally wrong!!!

Here's how you should go about it:

#### **Strategy 1: search by surname**

My experience has shown that a much better approach is to search the trees of your matches by surname, in the hope of identifying cousins who have the same surname in their tree as one of your 'brick wall' ancestors. Here's how to go about it:

- First create a list of your ancestral surnames - it's likely that every one of them terminates in a 'brick wall'
- How long ago did your DNA results come through? If it's less than 3 days I would suggest waiting before going any further - otherwise you might have to do everything twice (it takes a few days for Ancestry to reconstruct their databases)
- Ready to go? Log-in to your Ancestry account and click DNA to go to your DNA home page and click the green button "View all DNA Matches."
- At the top right of the next page you'll see a blue button "Search Matches;" click it. Now you have the option of searching by surname or birth location - or a combination of the two

*Tip: unless the surname is very rare, don't enter a birth location - and even when entering a birthplace, it's best to only enter the country; note that any birthplace you enter must be selected from the suggestions that Ancestry proposes.*

- Enter the surname of one of your 'brick wall' ancestors and click SEARCH. This filters out the matches who haven't provided any family tree as well as those who have a tree, but where nobody in the tree has the relevant surname. (You cannot use wildcards and do not check the 'include similar surnames box', as the results will erratic.) Carry out a separate search for the main variants.

*Tip: this search will examine the trees of all of your matches, wheth-*

*er they are public or private - though if they don't have an Ancestry tree, or the tree they've uploaded hasn't been linked to their DNA test they're not going to show in the results*

The next step is to look at the remaining matches - sometimes there won't be any at all, sometimes there will be a handful. To examine a match, click the green button "View March," at the right:

Here's an example taken from my own tree - I've obscured information that might identify my cousin:

[AncestryDNA Home](#)

[Member Matches for Charlotte](#)

[Ted](#)

**Predicted relationship: Close Family**

*Possible range: Close family - 1st cousins ( )*

Confidence: Extremely High

**Ethnicity**

Regions: Great Britain

Trace Regions: Ireland/Scotland/Wales, Scandinavia

The Shared Matches list shows DNA matches that you and another DNA match have in common. This might help you determine which family line you both come from or give you more evidence that you're related to a specific person or match.

Learn more

**Ted's tree**

**Shared Ancestor Hint** According to your family trees, it looks like you have a shared ancestor. Review the info below to confirm the relationship. You can take this opportunity to share stories and photos, or just say hello.

**Shared Ancestor Hint**

***Father***

***Mother***

Private

***Self***

Ted Sister

**SHARED SURNAMES**

Direct ancestor surnames that appear in both Ted Simons's tree and Charlotte's tree

**Joe Lewis Dove**

**Charles J Dove**

**Omie Mae Lincoln**

**Ted**

**Charlotte**

**1st Gen**

**2nd Gen**

**3rd Gen**

**4th Gen**

**5th Gen**

**6th Gen**

**7th Gen**

 **Surnames (10 generation pedigree)**

If the other person has a public tree then, even if your own tree is private, Ancestry will automatically identify the surnames of direct ancestors which appear in both trees. But they won't tell you about other surnames which occur in both trees, even though these matches can be equally important, so it's well worth glancing through the complete list of your cousin's ancestral surnames. Most of the time there won't be an obvious connection between you and the other member, but that doesn't mean that you should give up - there are still two more things you can try.

- First, click the SHARED MATCHES button: much of the time there won't be any shared matches, since Ancestry ignores distant matches, but now and again you'll be lucky - and when you are, it's worth following up, even if the other person doesn't have an online tree
- Second, click MAP AND LOCATIONS to see whether any of your cousin's ancestors come from the same places as some of your ancestors
  - ⇒ If you're able to identify a potential link send a message to your cousin telling them what you have managed to figure out - they may have additional information that isn't on their tree. You'll also need to contact your cousin if their tree is private.
  - ⇒ But if you're unable to figure out how you and this particular cousin might be related, first make a note of this fact (click the *Add note* link), then move on to the next person in the list.
  - ⇒ When there are no more matches with cousins who share this particular ancestral surname move on to the next surname, remembering that whilst we tend to focus our attentions on a small number of particularly frustrating 'brick walls', *every* ancestral line in our tree terminates with a 'brick wall'.
  - ⇒ When you have worked through ALL of your 'brick wall' surnames it's time to move on to the next strategy.....

### **Strategy 2: search by birthplace**

As you will have discovered when working through your list of surnames, most of the time the surname of the ancestors you share with a DNA cousin doesn't appear in both trees - indeed, it's quite possible that the surname of your common ancestor doesn't appear in either tree!

The problem is, when your female ancestors married they generally took their husband's surname. This makes it more difficult to research female ancestors whose children were born before the commencement of civil registration, since baptism registers don't usually give the mother's maiden surname - usually the only solution is to find the marriage. (By contrast you can continue researching your male ancestors even if you can't their marriage.)

Of course, this problem doesn't simply affect you and your research - it affects your cousins too; most researchers' trees become increasingly sparse with each

generation. If you've only identified 10% of your 256 6Great grandparents and your cousins have only identified 10% of theirs, the odds of finding out how you're related to a 7th cousin simply by comparing the names in your trees are remote.

Another way to figure out how you are related to your DNA cousins is to look for geographical overlaps - and here's how to go about it:

- Search for cousins whose ancestors were born in the same villages, towns, or counties as your ancestors - note that your search term must be selected from one of the options that Ancestry displays as you type
- Ancestry's focus on the US means that Essex, England isn't shown until you type a little more, i.e.:
- It's important to include the comma - simply typing doesn't work.

*Tip: abbreviations such as 'Gt' for 'Great' usually don't work (though there are some exceptions); also, entering the name of the parish church only works when it is part of the name of the village, e.g. Fornham St Martin*

- When you find a DNA cousin who has ancestors from the same area the next step is to evaluate how likely it is that finding the connection could knock down one of your 'brick walls. For example, if your cousin's most recent ancestors from that location were born in the 1600s, but your most distant ancestors from the same location weren't born until the 1800s, the chances of being able to knock down your 'brick wall' are minimal, since there are many generations separating you. On the other hand, if you both have 'brick walls' around the same time, there's a chance that going back just one generation would knock down both 'brick walls'.

Once you've worked through all the paces that your ancestors came from, it's once again time to move on to the next strategy.....

### **Strategy 3: look for overlaps with the more unusual components of your ethnicity**

Most readers of this newsletter have mostly British, Irish, or western European ancestry. But some of you will have Jewish ancestors, or ancestors from outside Europe, and whilst ethnicity estimates can be quite misleading, they do provide another way of analyzing your matches. Here's what Ancestry shows for one of my DNA cousins:

The screenshot shows a profile for a DNA match. On the left is a circular profile picture. To its right, the text reads: "Managed by [name] Member since 2010, last logged in today". Below this is a green button labeled "SEND MESSAGE". To the right of the button, under the heading "Ethnicity", the match is listed as "Regions: European Jewish" and "Trace Regions: Middle East, Caucasus". At the bottom, a red 'X' icon is next to the text "Predicted relationship: Distant Cousins", with a sub-note "Possible range: 5th - 8th cousins (What does this mean?)". Below that, a progress bar shows "Confidence: Moderate" with a small information icon.

If Ancestry had detected a Jewish component of my own ethnicity this would be one of the matches I'd be looking at very closely.

**Strategy 4: look for the 'elephant in the room'**

Because we all have 'brick walls' in our trees there are parts of our ancestry that are a closed book - yet there will inevitably be clues amongst our matches, if only we look for them. For example, if - like me - you don't know of any Irish ancestors, but have lots of matches with cousins who do, you might begin to wonder whether one of your 'brick walls' is concealing a connection to Ireland.

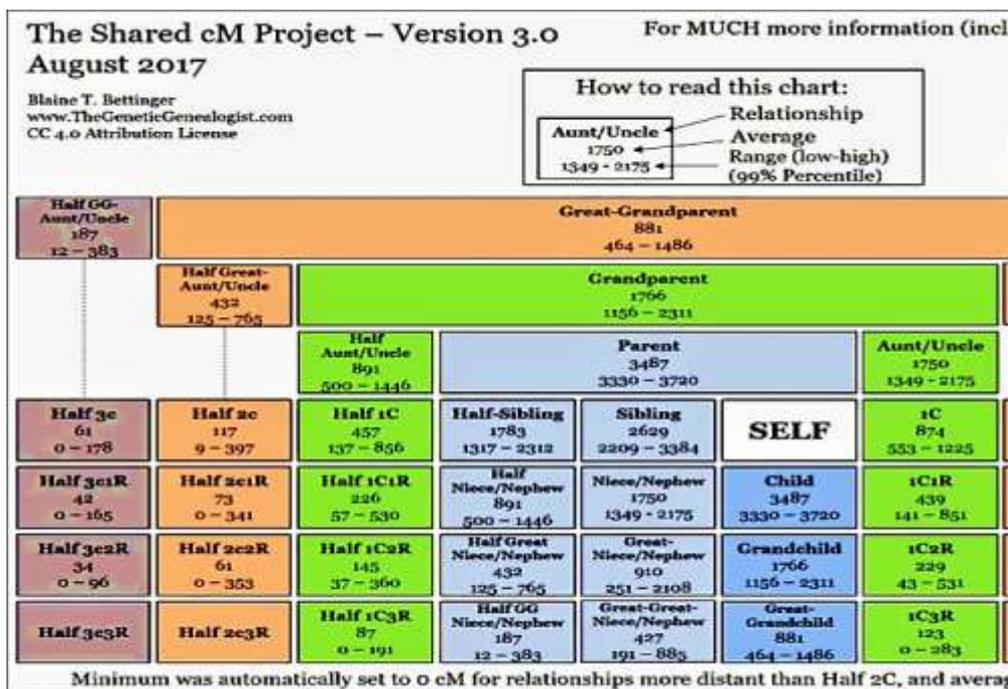
I can't provide you with a step-by-step guide - it's all about awareness (Louis Pasteur said that "chance favors the prepared mind").

*More tips:*

When you look at your matches many of them will be shown as having no tree - but that doesn't necessarily mean that they don't have an Ancestry tree, simply that their tree hasn't been attached to their DNA results.

**AtDNA Chart**

This amazing chart from Blaine Bettinger's blog shows how variable the amounts can be, and how this affects the amount of DNA shared by more distant





# AGM Agenda

- Call to Order
- Determination of a Quorum by the Secretary
- Reading of the Chief's Greeting
- Reading and approval of the 2017 AGM Minutes
- Reports:
  - President's Report by Lois Todd
  - Treasurer's Report on the funds received, paid-out and financial state of the organization.
  - Membership Report
  - Convener's Chair Report by Rob Gordon
  - Communications Chair Report
  - Scholarship Report
  - Epic Project Report
  - DNA Project Report
- Items of Business:
  - Discussion of Scottish Charity
  - Discussion of Goals for 2019
  - Call for any other new business to be discussed and motions to their disposition as it may pertain.
- Meeting Adjourned.

# Officers

## Board of Directors:

|                     |                  |                                 |
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| President -         | Lois M. Todd     | president@houseofgordonusa.org  |
| Vice President-     | John Gordon      | vp@houseofgordonusa.org         |
| Secretary-          | David Gauthier   | secretary@houseofgordonusa.org  |
| Treasurer-          | David Martin     | treasurer@houseofgordonusa.org  |
| Membership-         | Jen Mills Martin | membership@houseofgordonusa.org |
| Directors at Large- |                  |                                 |
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|                     | Lisa Gordon      | lisa@houseofgordonusa.org       |
|                     | Evan Rose        | evan@houseofgordonusa.org       |
| Convener Chair -    |                  |                                 |
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| QM-                 | John Gordon      | john@houseofgordonusa.org       |

## Commissioners:

|            |              |                             |
|------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
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| Southwest  | Stuart Craig | stuart@houseofgordonusa.org |

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# House of Gordon USA Newsletter

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